LISTEN
Moore

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LISTEN

EDITED BY GEORGE HARTLEY

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AFTER GOLIATH

Kingsley Amis

What shall be done to the man
that killeth this Philistine?
— I *Sam.* xvii, 27

The first shot out of that sling
Was enough to finish the thing:
The champion laid out cold
Before half the programmes were sold.
And then, what howls of dismay
From his fans in their dense array:
From aldermen, adjutants, aunts,
Administrators of grants,
Assurance-men, auctioneers,
Advisers about careers,
And advertisers, of course,
Plus the obvious b——s in force —
The whole reprehensible throng
Ten times an alphabet strong.
But such an auspicious debut
Was a little too good to be true,
Our victor sensed; the applause
From those who supported his cause
Sounded shrill and excessive now,
And who were they, anyhow?
Academics, actors who lecture,
Apostles of architecture,
Ancient-gods-of-the-abdomen men,
Angst-pushers, adherents of Zen,
Alastors, Austenites, A-test
Abolishers — even the straightest
Of issues looks pretty oblique

When a movement turns into a clique,
The conqueror mused, as he stopped
By the sword his opponent had dropped:
Trophy, or means of attack
On the rapturous crowd at his back?
He shrugged and left it, resigned
To a new battle, fought in the mind,
For faith that his quarrel was just,
That the right man lay in the dust.

AT A SOLEMN MUSIC — Donald Davie

Abandoned, him to Saint Cecilia's Day
Purcell delivers. Me an old alarm
At all dykes down and seawalls washed away
Undermines, breaches. From his sunken farm
Of human nature his flood music carried
Here, to knock my grating; sluices slide
Fast now, and now the whole thing blocked up solid
Straightens my Dutchman's courage. Horrified
I see him yearn to it, yielded up, his form
Sway, nod to the welter. He has occupied
With his own body the *gestalt* of storm.
Those uncontrolled incursions I have tried
To acquiesce in, but my valves conform
To panicked pressures. Wall-eyes stall the tide.

THE ISLAND GIRL — Richard Murphy

So I must sing of her maleficence
That clamming to a fault, let the good float
Past us, which tides of our affection brought,

Willing me to be wracked by impotence.
The time she cut my claws, let me escape,
I came to feed twice in her wicker trap.

Slack-water now, pray she retract her poisons,
Deep sunk in sand my keel, hard to the hull,
The flies vicious, the boatmen drunk and idle.

Here I must sing how with my own incense
On the island altar she and I had built
A foreign priest had her, my wine was spilt.

Worse for us all, she rose up to denounce
The rite itself, loosing a flood against me.
I was not born to fight but sail the sea.

So I must sing of her to fill her absence,
Clubbing the worthless fish I hook alone
When the moon is ribbed by my boat's skeleton.

Sing for her sake, while the drift of life thins
Hair that once fell where her small mouth fed,
Though what she loved then she now says she loathed.

And the song I sing is the song of her presence:
While the sea grinds, and her duplicity
Must sift away, I'll sing the good she did me.

DAILY BREAD

Patricia Avis

Touch and go. What else was it ever but touch
And go? Meanwhile we must keep up appearances
Though they, grown tight and shady, do not become us,
Depend a lot on the time of day
And the company. These two get harder to handle,
Don't seem to meet the way they used to.
At least the tow path idling here
With all its leaves for walking on
Must wait a while for night to call,
Wait for the wine and the laughter.

Two swans keep the lock.
Call it poise their arrant otherness,
Twin compass touch in Chinese white, preaching a state
No longer habitable. Or merely autumn emphasis
On a view fit for swans.
One dives, deep in the drift; that other lovely neck
Will follow, surely? Feet now, great tails and feet
Are the style in these parts; small losses and gains
Suck up the hours . . . Call it busy
Making a living out of this water?

BEFORE TEA

Philip Larkin

Summer is fading:
The leaves fall in ones and twos
From trees bordering
The new recreation ground.
In the hollows of afternoons
Young mothers assemble
At swing and sandpit
Setting free their children.

Behind them, at intervals,
Stand husbands in skilled trades,
An estateful of washing,
And the albums, lettered
Our Wedding, lying
Near the television:
Before them, the wind
Is ruining their courting-places

That are still courting-places
(But the lovers are all in school),
And their children, so intent on
Finding more unripe acorns,
Expect to be taken home.
Their beauty has thickened.
Something is pushing them
To the side of their own lives.

THE MISTRESS

Joan Barton

The short cut home lay through the cemetery —
A suburban shrubbery swallowing up old graves
Iron palings tipped with rusted fleur-de-lys
A sort of cottage orné at the gates,
Ridiculous and sad;

And lost in their laurel groves,
Eaten up by moss,
Stained marble flaking stone like hatches down,
The unloved unvisited dead.

In the no-man's-land of dusk a short cut home —
The exultant sense of life a trail of fire
Drawn into that tunnel roofed with the cypress smell
And walled with silence adding year to year:

Too far, too far: always
Under the smothering boughs in airless dark
The spirit dwindled, and the fire
Flickered then failed:

Gently implacably from the shade
The indecipherable dedications spoke
'Dear wife' . . . 'devoted mother' . . .
'Beloved child' . . .

New American Poems

THE LAST FRIEND — William Stafford

In every life poor body earns its own evil,
some promised blow or sickness that will be final;
hungrily searching, poor body gets killed.

A long romance curves down toward that marriage —
a radiant virus, a processional fever.
Hear the peals of reunion in the broken-hearted aged!

Somewhere in a hall, hear the bride hurry
toward a meeting of rapture to which all are bidden —
poor body, poor lover, in one grave buried.

A POET TO A NOVELIST — William Stafford

When we write, fighting feedback, eedback, dback,
back, ack of the forward part of our brains,
a perfect flower blooms from all failure; we hear
every wrong number down a tincan telephone line jangle the bells
till the neighbors' ears are supporting the line,
everybody's effort scaled down, aled down, d down, down
toward disappearing — all who lunge plunging.
We let them go by at the world's pace.

There are hills our windows give every winter;
when we close the curtain we know the streetlight is left
outside alone; from the end of the street (this is the edge of town)
the few slant flakes come out of the dark and fall on the house
that goes deaf while night fans over the roof.
Such arrivals in storms are one kind of chance,
a difference we want after our days doing
one thing at a time, the way purpose is.

We take everything stacked, being all at once
like a jewel and then into some act; we pass calendar knots
through our hands, remembering not just important things —
maybe the welcome a Western town gave early women,

dust from the alley past the clothesline, anybody's sky
sighting down given streets, years like a fan opening
and then closing. We pay it out (still owing what's near us
every aid, no matter the worth, because it is near).

We hear such blossom syllables in the sounds that rise
that we cannot find a path among true words,
redundant honesty of the scrupulous; we go down
with what occurs to any length; echoes realer
than originals, coming from cliffs the air belongs on
or comes back to sideways. We happen in the night
on orchards that stutter whiteness as the moon passes:
spring comes every night when luck is there.

We owe the twilight aid because day
once prevailed: the bad parts run a world
ready to fade but still present if a person
will come out from his eyes and be willing to hold
what he views. We welcome all back the child's way —
the finding of new things or sorting through gravel
or discovering the scent of alfalfa
that knows water out of the desert in the evening.

Over the night arc our need reaches for duty,
our state a glimmer to be good. Putting down
the last book or finding the light on the wall
by feel and memory, we veer toward the saintly,
say 'Sorry!' (But we rebel at only the good: —
read and do what you want, and don't even be eager
to find the best — no finicky appetites.) No place
is wide enough to be sorry in, not any place.

Because you walk for us we call you this,
'pilgrim for rain.' No one else will meet us
low enough to hear wind in the grass
and let it go over our place. We wait,
low and looking for the oat spire against the sun,
leaf and straw, hay attached by accident to the ground.
Because we write we know the cost
of every day — the cost is all the rest.

Because you know it so, I give you this.

ADVICE TO A PROPHET — Richard Wilbur

When you come, as soon you must, to the streets of our city,
Mad-eyed from stating the obvious,
Not proclaiming our fall but begging us
In God's name to have self-pity,

Spare us all word of the weapons, their force and range,
The long numbers that rocket the mind;
Our slow, unreckoning hearts will be left behind,
Unable to fear what is too strange.

Nor shall you scare us with talk of the death of the race.
How should we dream of this place without us? —
The sun mere fire, the leaves untroubled about us,
A stone look on the stone's face?

Speak of the world's own change. Though we cannot conceive
Of an undreamt thing, we know to our cost
How the dreamt cloud crumbles, the vines are blackened by frost,
How the view alters. We could believe,

If you told us so, that the white-tailed deer will slip
Into perfect shade, grown perfectly shy,
The lark avoid the reaches of our eye,
The jack-pine lose its knuckled grip

On the cold ledge, and every torrent burn
As Xanthus once, its gliding trout
Stunned in a twinkling. What should we be without
The dolphin's arc, the dove's return,

These things in which we have seen ourselves and spoken?
Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our natures forth when that live tongue is all
Dispelled, that glass obscured or broken,

In which we have said the rose of our love and the clean
Horse of our courage, in which beheld
The singing locust of the soul unshelled,
And all we mean or wish to mean.

Ask us, ask us whether with the worldless rose
Our hearts shall fail us; come demanding
Whether there shall be lofty or long standing
When the bronze annals of the oak-tree close.

HEINE DYING IN PARIS — Robert Lowell

I

Morphine

Yes, in the end they are much of a pair,
my twin gladiator beauties — thinner than a hair,
their bronze bell-heads embrace the void; one's more austere,
however, and much the whiter; none dares cry down his character.
How confidingly the corrupt one rocked me in his arms;
his poppy garland, nearing, hushed my mind's alarms
at sword-point for a moment.
Soon a pin-point of infinite regression! And now that incident
is closed. There's no way out,
unless the other turn about
and, pale, distinguished, perfect, drop his torch.
He and I stand alerted for life's doric, drilled, withdrawing march:
sleep is lovely, death is better still,
not to have been born is of course the miracle.

II

Every idle desire has died in my breast;
even hatred of evil things, even my feeling
for my own and other men's distress —
what lives in me is death.
The curtain falls, the play is over;
my dear German public is goosestepping home, yawning.
They are no fools, these good people:
they are slurping their dinners quite happily,
bear-hugging beer-mugs — singing and laughing.

That fellow in Homer's book was quite right:
he said: the meanest little Philistine living
in Stukkert am Neckar is luckier
than I, Achilles Pelides, the dead lion,
glorious shadow-king of the underworld.

III

My zenith was luckily happier than my night:
whenever I touched the lyre of inspiration, I smote
the Chosen People. Often — all sex and thunder —
I tupped those overblown and summer clouds . . .
But the summer has flowered. My sword is scabarded
in the marrow of my spinal discs.
Soon I must lose all these half-gods
that made my world so agonizingly half-joyful.

The hand clangs to a close on the dominant;
the champagne glass of orange sherbet breaks
on my lips — all glass; straws in the wind?
Mortal, I witness earth's abstruse acumen,
her sugared leasehold on life:
mid-summer's frail and green-juice bird's-nest.

(*Adapted from Heine.*)

DENK' ES, O SEELE — W. D. Snodgrass

After Eduard Mörike

A pine seedling somewhere springs,
Within what woods, who knows?
In who can tell what garden
Some rosebush grows.
Already they are fated —
Remember it, my soul —
Into your grave to strike
Roots and grow.

Two black colts graze
In open pastures, or
Turn homeward to the town,
Lively and capering.
How slowly they will pace
Before your corpse,
Perhaps, perhaps before
They have worn loose
Upon their hooves those shoes
That I see glittering.

LETTER

W. D. Snodgrass

In our bare feet we crossed the sopping lawn
And touched huge maples splintered in the storm
Of Independence Night, which is your birthday.
Tonight I write where we first woke together;
I sat today in grass where we had gone.
Those ragged stubs where branches wrenched away
Are old scars darkening with the Autumn weather.
Beneath, the locust husks are golden, warm.

The little trolley bridge we tarried on
And spit, or tried to, on the shining cars
Beneath our feet — today I saw, Janice,
This traffic on its evening way. By wars
And wars, our world is growing toward its peace —
The mind heavy with praise, though you are gone.

AT MIESBACH

Edgar Bowers

I have been watching prisoners as they march
From Austria to Germany. The same
Grey thousands in their dirty uniforms
Drift through fatigue and patriotic shame
Their quiet relief embitters and affirms;

While all day long behind me, my friends crowd
Around a looted radio, to hear,
As if an entertainment planned for them,
The uncontrollable defeat in war
Of insolent and reckless stratagem.

They are the chaste, the irresponsible
For whom no action has significance,
Inscrutable slim images, whose doubt,
While mastering their lives' extravagance,
Instructs me in the hazard they have fought.

For theirs is the morality whose deed
Requires annihilation of the fact
That stains their pure intention. Physically brave
And imperturbable, they only act
Because it is their innocence they save.

Baffled contempt for the definable
Exalts the voice that from the void repeats
Immaculate event, the consequence
The volume of the radio completes
Of motives hidden in irrelevance.

Triumph exacts, not words, but gestures: swords
Cogently broken; obstinate parade,
With music, of the colors; the last toast
To equal hazard, action undismayed
That either power was powerless to exhaust.

Yet they must celebrate their virtue: lonely,
In dark suspense, those prisoners must confess
The proof of their conviction's just defeat
To art more intimate than consciousness,
The unapparent flux possessing sight.

There they shall cry out, fall down on the floor,
Or, still, observe, pictured in specter size,
White bodies mastered, faces without a claim,
And on the faces thoughtless stains for eyes.
They shall find out the oldest fantasies
Of ignorance, the instrument of lies.

SONNET

Edgar Bowers

We go to school with those who are not born.
The imperturbably unrealized
Of whom our living is the emphasis
Restore to nothing everything we learn.
They are our otherness, who, when
The teacher speaks the Latin for *I am*,
Encounter in the black-board the spent sum
And ordered distance wherein they remain.

Look, on the wall, the clock's round waste ignores
The stealthy motion of its artifice!
So we who change must suffer what we are
Through imperfection schooling us in loss,
Until we shall require the pitying face
And final promise they have shared with us.

THE SEAFARER — Joseph Langland

New-born, the lambs stood up.
I clapped my hands.
Mother, they wobble, but they run in bands.

And while my baby brother
Slept in his crib
The yearling lambs honored the Easter rib.

Sheep in my hobbles, sheep
Bled in my yard;
Blue eyes so meek, so meek; old hands so hard.

Slow, slow, now upward crawl
From caves of the sea.
How crude a glance against divinity.

How long a walk! We broke
The ocean mist
And shuttled up the river beds, sun-kissed.

Sheep in my hobbles, sheep
Bled in my yard;
Blue eyes so meek, so meek; old hands so hard.

Hills, mountains we strode;
Then our airstride
Stepped out upon pure space, sword at our side.

Returns to the sunswept stars,
Returns to the sun.
Star eyes holy with fire! Run, sheep, run.

Sheep in my hobbles, sheep
Bled in my yard;
Blue eyes so meek, so meek; old hands so hard.

MISSING THE SEA

Chester Kallman

The scotch-fir, evergreen, is not all green
But shades itself to inner wine-dark, wine
Poured on soil; its green splayed edges whiten
Fronting woodland green more young, hung before
Its own bare center. Surely, lingering outward
In half-light, sibilant, the shaken tiers
Stop time unless the foam-white needles flow
On moonlit shoals, in steady wavering ranks
Of long slow breakers waft the pale dead home
From broken voyages. Surely they gather
On the unprinted sand now gazing back
With infinite longing for infinite
Caresses. A whispering tide withdraws
In shaken silk, Isolde's call: that tryst,
Like being alive, is perilous; like dying,
Its charming genius crudely a *Come back!*
Come back: The fir wants of the shifting sky
No further element of uncertainty.

Battle tamed this land; one acre of blood
Bought one whole acre of equanimity
And year by year was parcelled out to all,
Whereof the rose is emblem and not sign.
From endless journey I awake in darkness
Slowly to hear companionable rain
Or hear the rising wind that shares with rain
Deciduous music, music in growing things,
Unpeopled, personal; and I may sleep
In this dear peace again. The nightingale
Builds no nest in fir-tree or in pine;
Marking familiar properties, the dead,
Within horizons that do not buck and run,
Are planted where they always will remain.

Bless the bright morning! Surely this garden
Reborn of darkness is blackbird song, the courting
Blackbird a younger garden sings, and deep
In the long-shadowed wood two crystal notes
Of lingering rain swell at a twig's end, drop
To cuckoo at their domestic echo, our own
Time-keeping toy. Hawks frame a picture gulls

Never have crossed nor heard; no, gulls cry deserts,
Play-pens of burning stone, rejected bottles
Rubbing at salt-gnawed pier-heads ringed with oil;
And breed no echo, only one reply:
The longing heart beats, beats *Not I! Not I!*
Time is partitioned by the cuckoo-clock.
I measure time in tides, I school my ear
Upon the conch's animated roar.

Surely there is much in having come here:
Shading itself, the fir points noonward; here
A fallen blossom like a boatless sail
Skims over the pond between walking flies
And one unruffled brown-edged water-lily;
Here even so the heart cannot but choose
To drink a darker meaning of the rose.

CROSSINGS

Robert Beloof

Pity the men for whom the modulations of Bourbon
or the delicate finigling of a poem or a merger
or the seamanlike roundings of loving lie
like a landscape whose sole perquisite is
to be the roadbed of a way to power,
or to leave something, or to make free
another valley. For when they look behind, the sun
will be setting on something sad indeed,
a waste of violated space, while ahead
all is barred to the aged.

But blessed they
who approach a splendidness beyond their savoring selves
with awe and ease, who, pleased and amazed,
enter each shaded shelf and its wry
proportions, acceptance shaping its grace.

And how unlike the smashing men that rise
with something in their needs to rid them of,
these men, as dark descends, with restful energies
making virtue of their lovers' indolence
reconcentrate the light in a more eloquent way.

They grant a silence and a sleep by dawn,
and they are risen and gone so gently
that all behind yawns child-like into sun.
Across their valley thus they rise on brittling bones
until the next, forbidden valley waves below
and wrings a sigh for every greening hint.

But when they turn to stare from whence they came
all has been altered by their passing there
to aspects passionately frozen
as dusk will find a shadowless universe
between the dark and day; a Japanese garden
wherein, so many fireflies, their memories
trace the sole wildness in that exquisite air.

WOMAN

Robert Beloof

When we have kissed her in the dark of dawn
And left her, star-entousled, palpable
With the white scars of portentous meteors,

As we armor for the bird-busy sun
She quarrels against our going, fluttering her supple
Pennons, as if she were equivalent to the wars

That lie out there among the trees and walls.
But doesn't she, when the door clangs upon her keep,
Really close her eyes without regret, thinking,

'None brings that mighty man to such whole falls,
None makes his boldness into peaceful stillness slip
So certainly as this my white-flagged arguing,'

Or, 'A flickering man. But I can make him
A torch that roars down generation's corridor,
I, his only honored enemy scabbard.'

Then these Angelic sayings nestle dim
As night-birds on her heavenly hills, and, on her
Lashes, the Cherubim of her unanswerable last word.

GLACIER

Josephine Miles

To touch old snow
Frightens me, to feel
A flake settle,
Rest on my palm, and vanish,
Yet rest on the rock a thousand years,
Settle
In a tyranny of space,

So that each mountain
Commands a burden
Of ice so gross
Its features are singular
In weight and stress,
Its outline as of character
Thoughtful and fateful.

When I take
Into my palm this flake
This feather
Of molted weather,
And think how long ago
It fell to hand and brow,
I touch a glacial snow.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Josephine Miles

Out of an English mystery which a detective
Sagged through, followed by a short subject
On Cornwall, we emerged into a looping storm
Which chuckled in the gutters unexpected,
A joke. Now what we need is a detective
With an umbrella? Did you hear?

Pacing down Elmwood direct you come
Alight with laughter, nearer and more near,
Balancing a Japanese paper parasol on your thumb.
I thought you were Fulbrighting in Burma, unthought of.
Ever across this scene, outside the dark marquee,
Pass and repass the actors whom I love.

LOOK ! FROM MY WINDOW — Louis Simpson

Look! From my window there's a view
Of city streets,
Where only lives as dry as tortoises
Can crawl — the Gallapagos of desire.

There is the day of Negroes with red hair,
And the day of insane women on the subway;
There is the day of the word Committee,
And the night of the blind man with the electric guitar.

He knows we are pretending
All day, to be in earnest;
The bell tolls, and the hearse advances,
And the mourners follow, for his entertainment.

When darkness falls on the enormous street
The air is filled with Eros, whispering.
Eyes, mouths, contrive to meet
In silence, fearing they may be prevented.
Now tears are falling by the shores of lakes,
And dreams say to the old,
Then you were happy, when you still could tremble.

AMERICAN DREAMS — Louis Simpsor

How could a man named Poquelin not be happy,
Or a girl named Bianca?
Their names knew who they were, and came to meet them,
Bowing, and led them to the Grand Hotel.

Paris and Venice are poems, New York not.
It takes more nerve to live in a furnished room
In Brooklyn, than to reign
In Denmark. As for the country,

These houses built of wood sustain
Colossal snows.
Slapping the aces down . . . cigars and whiskey . . .
And the wives yawn . . . Life is unwilling.

Where is the Mississippi panorama
And the girl who played the piano?
Where are you, Walt?
The Open Road went to the used-car lot.

'I am here,' he answered.
'Did I not warn you that it was Myself
I meant? Were my words not sufficiently plain?
Here on the fabulous raft with the King and the Duke.'

And love smiled like a spirit.
'My dear,' she said, 'we are of Eden still.
The way to China or a new Atlantis
Was never mine.
Be still. There is an angel in the gate.'

THIRD AVENUE IN SUNLIGHT Anthony Hecht

Third Avenue in sunlight. Nature's error.
Already the bars are filled and John is there.
Beneath a plentiful lady over the mirror
He tilts his glass in the mild mahogany air.

I think of him when he first got out of college,
Serious, thin, unlikely to succeed;
For several months he hung around the Village,
Boldly T-shirted, unfettered but unfreed.

Now he confides to a stranger, 'I was first scout,
And kept my glimmers peeled till after dark.
Our outfit had as its sign a bloody knout.
We met behind the museum in Central Park.

Of course, we were kids.' But still those savages,
War-painted, a flap of leather at the loins,
File silently against him. Hostages
Are never taken. One summer, in Des Moines,

They entered his hotel room, tomahawks
Flashing like barracuda. He tried to pray.
Three years of treatment. Occasionally he talks
About how he almost didn't get away.

Daily the prowling sunlight whets its knife
Along the sidewalk. We almost never meet.
In the Rembrandt dark he lifts his amber life.
My bar is somewhat further down the street.

THE END OF THE WEEKEND Anthony Hecht

A dying firelight slides along the quirt
Of the cast-iron cowboy where he leans
Against my father's books. The lariat
Whirls into darkness. My girl, in skin-tight jeans,
Fingers a page of Captain Marryat,
Inviting insolent shadows to her shirt.

We rise together to the second floor.
Outside, across the lake, an endless wind
Whips at the headstones of the dead and wails
In the trees for all who have and have not sinned.
She rubs against me and I feel her nails.
Although we are alone, I lock the door.

The eventual shapes of all our formless prayers,
This dark, this cabin of loose imaginings,
Wind, lake, lip, everything awaits
The slow unloosening of her underthings.
And then the noise. Something is dropped. It grates
Against the attic beams.
I climb the stairs,

Armed with a belt.
A long magnesium strip
Of moonlight from the dormer cuts a path
Among the shattered skeletons of mice.
A great black presence beats its wings in wrath.
Above the boneyard burn its golden eyes.
Some small grey fur is pulsing in its grip.

VERSI PROSAICI — Ezra Pound

Grotius index'd 'till 1801,
Puffendorf against treaties as basis of law.
Seagle on Coke: law conceived to exist only as limitation of power.
John Austin, an englander, attempted to separate law from moral philosophy.
Marx from Hegel, who believed in absolute monarchy.

FIVE FRENCH POEMS — Ezra Pound

The 'Study of French Poets' appeared in the *Little Review* nearly forty years ago. The student hoped that the selection would stimulate thought and that possibly one or two of the thousands of aspirants for literary glory would take up the matter. As no adequate translations have yet appeared, he now takes pity on those who haven't had time to learn French but might like to know what the French authors were writing about, and herewith starts to provide a guide to the meaning of the poems then given in the original only.

RIMBAUD: *Comedy In Three Caresses*

She hadn't much left on, and the big trees,
With no discretion, swished
Their leaves over the window-pane
Teasingly, so near, so near.

Half naked in my big chair,
She put her hands together
And her little toes tickled the floor,
Quivering comfortably, and so small.

I watched a little sprouting flush,
The colour of wax, flutter
Like a smile over her neat breasts:
Fly on a rose bush.

I kissed her traced ankles
And she smiled a longish smile, bad sign
That shattered out into clear trills,
Crystaline.

Her little feet scampered under her shift:
'Will you *stop* now!!'
After the first permitted boldness,
The smile pretending coldness?

Her poor eyelids fluttered under my lips
As I kissed her eyes
And she threw back her weakling head:
'That's better now,' she said.

'But I have something still to . . .'
I chucked the rest between her breasts
In a caress that brought a kindly smile,
Benevolence, all of it.

She hadn't much left on, and the big trees
Swished their leaves over the window-pane
At ease, teasingly, and so near.

RIMBAUD: *Cabaret Vert*

Wearing out my shoes, 8th day
On the bad roads, I got into Charleroi.
Bread, butter, at the Green Cabaret
And the ham half cold.

Got my legs stretched out
And was looking at the simple tapestries,
Very nice when the gal with the big bubs
And lively eyes,

Not one to be scared of a kiss and more,
Brought the butter and bréad with a grin
And the luke-warm ham on a coloured plate,

Pink ham, white fat and a sprig
Of garlic, and a great chope of foamy beer
Gilt by the sun in that atmosphere.

RIMBAUD: *Anadyomene*

As it might have been from under a green tin coffin-lid,
A woman's head with brown over-oiled hair
Rises out of a theatre box, slow and stupid
With ravages in rather poor repair.

Then ups the fat grey neck and bulgy shoulder-blades,
The shortish back going out and in
And the fat, in clumsy slabs under the skin,
Seems ready to emerge without further aids.

LAURENT TAILHADE: *Rus*

What lures the antient truss-maker from his shoppe whose luxury
Sucked in the passers-by,
Is his garden at Auteuil where zinnias void of all odour or stink
Look like varnished zinc.

That's where he, of an evening, comes to taste the aromatic air
In his flannel coat and rocking-chair
As factories of suet and animal-
Black spread out the whiff and flavour from Grenelle.

Although free-thinking and a quite free mason,
He thinks a favouring god in propitious hour
Gave him such refuge — a goldfish dying in the fountain basin —
While, with Chinese lanterns in a moorish tower
His ' young lady ' hums to and fro
Spicing his raspberry syrup with a couplet by Nadaud.

RIMBAUD: *Lice-Hunters*

When the kid's forehead is full of red torments
Imploring swarms of dreams with vague contents,
Two large and charming sisters come
With wafty fingers and silvery nails, to his bed-room.

They set the kid by a wide-open window where
A tangle of flowers bathes in the blue air
And run fine, alluring, terrible
Fingers through his thick dew-matted hair.

He hears the rustling of their timid breath
Flowered with the long pinkish vegetable honies underneath
Or broken anon, sibilant, the saliva's hiss
Drawn from a lip, or a desire to kiss.

He hears their black eyelashes beat in that quietude
And ' Crack ' ! to break his inebriated indolences
Neath their electric and so soft fingers death assails
The little lice beneath their regal nails.

And Lo! there mounts within him Wine of Laziness —
a squiffer's sigh
Might bring delirium — and the kid feels
Neath the slowness of their caresses, constantly
Wane and fade a desire to cry.

RECENT AMERICAN VERSE

Homage to Mistress Bradstreet, John Berryman. (Faber, 18/-.)
Life Studies, Robert Lowell. (Faber, 10/6.)

In both of these volumes the aspect that bulks largest is the poet's relation with some facet of history. Mr Berryman through narration, soliloquy and ecstatic dialogue, Mr Lowell in a series of snapshots of his historic family and himself, each in his different way seeks a rapprochement with the past. Both are ambitious. One of them, Mr Lowell, achieves a precarious success, firstly because he discovers the adequate poetic means, and secondly because the terms on which he undertakes his relationship are measured and undemanding.

It is as difficult to accept Edmund Wilson's rating of the title poem in *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* ('the most distinguished long poem by an American since *The Waste Land*') as the claims made by Conrad Aiken and Robert Fitzgerald that it is of classic status. What goes wrong? The weakness of the poem lies principally in the fact that Berryman, unlike Lowell, is unsure of the kind of meaning that is to be won from the relationship with history, the insecurity betraying itself in an idiom that is tormented, forced and eccentric, as if the poet wished to compensate for an absence of clear intentions by an appearance of irrepressible libidinal energy. Word order ('Can be hope a cloak?', 'Brood I do on myself naked.'), metric, vocabulary, all court a chaos against which italics, accented words and typographical spacing fight weakly for order. Berryman pays his homage to Anne Bradstreet, the first woman to write English verse in America. On what terms does he approach his seventeenth century protagonist? 'I have earned the right to be alone with you,' he claims, to which she replies down the ages: 'I know./I want to take you for my lover.' The upshot of the poem, perpetually running a high fever, is that life is painful and that Mistress Bradstreet and Mr Berryman, being alienated poets, both realise this as others do not. A second theme (Anne found her heart 'carnal and sitting loose from God' and contracted the pox) is that the flesh is weak and both she and Mr Berryman have undergone its infirmities. But this is scarcely adequate subject matter for a poem of fifty seven stanzas and consequently the subject matter must have emotion turned loose upon it. In this Mr Berryman, among other things, does what somebody was bound to do sooner or later — a birth sequence in Hopkinese:

> So squeezed, wince you I scream? I love you and hate
> off with you. Ages! *Useless.* Below my waist
> he has me in Hell's vise.
> Stalling. He let go. Come back: brace
> me somewhere. No. No. Yes! everything down
> hardens . . .
>
> I can *can* no longer
> and it passes the wretched trap whelming and I am me

The simultaneous and excessive disorder of metric and syntax are characteristic of the poem as a whole and they date back to that taste for hysteria to be found in earlier pieces in this volume:

> No time for shame,
> Whippoorwill calling, excrement falling, time
> Rushes like a madman forward. Nothing can be known.

What is one to make of that? Or of such lines as, 'I cannot wring/ like laundry, blue my soul'; or 'he laughed/And like a hound he leapt out of his mind'? One of the more orderly poems, *The Statue*, closes with 'the dark apartment where one summer/Night an insignificant dreamer,/Defeated occupant, will close his eyes . . .' One feels that the persona of the insignificant dreamer defeated by life, 'the expensive drama/Wherein he wasted so much skill', betrays the order of self-pity and want of self-knowledge which reflect themselves throughout Berryman's oeuvre.

There are, let it be admitted, too many poems in Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* that suffer from inadequacies of tone and an immaturity as disabling as Berryman's:

> Oh my *Petite*,
> Clearest of all God's creatures, still all air and nerve:
> you were in your twenties, and I,
> once hand on glass
> and heart in mouth,
> outdrank the Rahvs in the heat
> of Greenwich Village, fainting at your feet —

But there is more than this to Lowell — chiefly in the first section of the third part of the volume where a series of autobiographical and family poems deftly evades the portentousness that might well dog a poet concerned with reflecting on what it means to be a Lowell of Boston. The rich and splendidly controlled rhetoric of, say, *The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket* has gone overboard and in an idiom that has the effect of staccato improvisation, Lowell pins down those novelistic moments of unforeseen history. Take the close of the poem in which he returns from Italy with his mother's body:

> In the grandiloquent lettering on Mother's coffin,
> *Lowell* had been misspelled LOVEL.
> The corpse
> was wrapped like *panetone* in Italian tinfoil.

His father's death is registered with a comparable sureness:

> Father's death was abrupt and unprotesting.
> His vision was still twenty-twenty.
> After a morning of anxious, repetitive smiling,
> his last words to Mother were:
> 'I feel awful.'

But these excerpts scarcely do complete justice to that gallery of family photographs, the best of which is, perhaps, *My last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow*. In using the word 'photograph' one is

conscious that what one has to deal with is something artistically less fine than *The Quaker Graveyard* and less susceptible of development. Lowell seems to have reached a kind of poetic impasse — formal rhetoric no longer works for him, or in using it, he scores only the bathos of such lines as those in which he refers to the Virgin as 'angel-wing'd, gorgeous as a jungle bird'. The family poems dodge such dangers by attempting, occasionally with a Williams-like naivety, 'a plain simple copy of nature,' to quote *Spectator* 85, 'destitute of the helps and ornaments of art.' One can scarcely build a poetic on such a scaffolding, and it remains to be seen where Mr Lowell will turn next.

Charles Tomlinson

TRANSLATIONS AND APPROXIMATIONS

Molière's *The Misanthrope,* translated by Richard Wilbur. (Faber, 18/-.)
Schiller's *Mary Stuart,* freely translated and adapted by Stephen Spender. (Faber, 15/-.)
Perse's *Anabasis,* translated by T. S. Eliot. (Faber, 15/-.)
By a Lonely Sea, translations and poems by John Cairncross. (Hong Kong U.P., HK$10.00; O.U.P., 12/6.)

RICHARD WILBUR has produced an excellent *Misanthrope.* It is a thoroughly workmanlike job in heroic couplets, with no slovenly unclarities and with many ingenious solutions; and it bears out the translator's claim that it is 'a line-for-line verse translation quite as faithful as any which have been done in prose'. (Comparison with the recent Penguin prose version by John Wood will show that this is still true.) This play allows a certain flexibility in the translator's approach, since it employs a mixture of styles from racy realism to the conventions of preciosity. Wilbur's style is, on the whole, rather less formal and rather more direct than the original; one feels that the play has been given a brisk brush, a clean-limbed and American look. This is partly a natural result of substituting pentameters for alexandrines and thereby losing something of the subtly distributed balances, pauses, and emphases of the French. Not that Wilbur, in his own poetry, is an unsophisticated writer, but in this translation he has sometimes permitted the highly sophisticated 'top' of Molière's tone to go, no doubt in the interests of stageworthiness in our more impatient age. Compare, for example:

> Je ne querelle point; mais votre humeur, Madame,
> Ouvre au premier venu trop d'accès dans votre âme:
> Vous avez trop d'amants qu'on voit vous obséder,
> Et mon cœur, de cela, ne peut s'accommoder
> (Alceste to Célimène, Act 2, sc. 1)

with Wilbur's

I've no desire to quarrel. But I deplore
Your inability to shut the door
On all these suitors who beset you so.
There's what annoys me, if you care to know.

The most brilliantly executed scene is the one which was published in Wilbur's *Poems 1943-1956* — the highly entertaining battle of the two serpents Arsinoé and Célimène (Act 3, sc. 5). The style here is tightly and beautifully in control of the controlled hatreds which are being inch by inch unloosed.

Of course, I needn't tell you where I stood;
I came to your defense as best I could,
Assured them you were harmless, and declared
Your soul was absolutely unimpaired.
But there are some things, you must realize,
One can't excuse, however hard one tries,
And I was forced at last into conceding
That your behavior, Madam, is misleading,
That it makes a bad impression, giving rise
To ugly gossip and obscene surmise,
And that if you were more *overtly* good,
You wouldn't be so much misunderstood.

The Misanthrope himself is of course the centre of the play; his strictures on the insincerities of civilized human behaviour impel our attention both outwards to society and inwards to himself. Although he is an extravagant, self-deceived, and partly self-righteous figure, the intensity of his passion for honest dealing and his inevitable but cruel rejection by Célimène set him on one of the farthest boundary-stones of comedy. If we even have an odd qualm about Malvolio, what should we not feel for Alceste! It is certainly an uncomfortable and disturbing play, and perhaps this uncomfortableness could have been more forcefully brought out in the translation. The speeches of Alceste are a little lacking in the explosive energy required; an actor would feel this particularly in their opening lines. Compare:

Quoi! vous bravez ainsi ce témoin convaincant? (Molière)
You take this matter lightly, it would seem (Wilbur)

or

Tant mieux, morbleu! tant mieux, c'est ce que je demande
(Molière)
So much the better; just what I wish to hear (Wilbur).

But all in all, Wilbur has given a most admirable and useful poetic version of this celebrated work.

Schiller's *Maria Stuart* has never made much headway in Britain. This 'streamlined adaptation', as Stephen Spender calls it, was written for the Old Vic production of the play at the Edinburgh Festival in 1958. Excellent though that production was, and interesting though the prefatory remarks of producer (Peter Wood) and translator are, I cannot see *Mary Stuart* even in its present lightened guise finding a very deep niche

in our repertory. This is hardly Schiller's fault, or Spender's. It may be our loss, but all a British audience can feel is that if the play was *either* more interestingly written *or* more true to the historical facts, it *could* be extremely powerful. I agree with Spender when he says that current views of poetry are too narrow when they disallow 'that unambiguous poetry in which words tend to disappear and leave us with the ideas that they are about'. But ideas so nakedly presented are defenceless, and if they concern well-known historical events and persons, I don't agree that our natural objections to their lack of truth or accuracy are 'half-baked'. Schiller's many departures from history in *Mary Stuart* are all devoted to showing Mary Queen of Scots as a dignified, almost innocent, greatly maligned, and at the end fully repentant Catholic martyr. For this purpose Elizabeth and Leicester are downgraded, to the point of caricature, and a fervent Catholic convert, Mortimer, is invented. There are two big dramatic scenes: the encounter and squabble of Mary and Elizabeth at Fotheringay, and Mary's final confession to Melvil and receiving of the Sacrament. Both scenes, though unhistorical, are grippingly effective in performance; yet I doubt whether they are enough in themselves to redeem what most British audiences would feel to be the tedium and special pleading of the surrounding argument. Spender gives a much abridged version, with considerable displacement of lines and speeches, and as he says 'a good many deliberate mistranslations'. It is fluent, clear, and fairly vigorous, written in a rough blank verse with occasional shorter lines for dramatic effect.

> England is
> Ruled by a bastard, and a noble people
> Corrupted by a cunning trickster!
> If there were justice, it is she
> Who'd kneel to me, and I'd stand where she is!
> (Act 3, sc. 4)

Two important stage-directions have been rather strangely omitted (Mary's impressive entry at Act 5, sc. 2, and her falling into the arms of Leicester on her way to the scafford in Act 5, sc. 5). Streamlining has its boldest stroke when in Mary's last words to her confessor, who has asked her if she goes to the block convinced of her innocence of the charges against her, Schiller's

> Gott würdigt mich, durch diesen unverdienten Tod
> Die frühe schwere Blutschuld abzubüssen

is rendered as

> I do.

Anabasis is a curious poem, and a curious translation too. In spite of its having come through two later editions since the first in 1930, each making improvements and getting closer to the text, there is still something not quite satisfactory about it. What is odd is that the improvements which could still be made are surely obvious. E.g. (1) removing unidiomatic translatorese like 'and of respite with ourselves there is not', 'what would these voices with us?', 'an odour of forum', 'treaties of

amity and of boundary', 'this deadwater where floats a dead ass', 'this chant of all a people' ('ce chant de tout un peuple'!); (2) removing archaic and precious tone-raisers like 'Came such an one who . . .' and words like 'springes', 'puissant', 'cruse', 'smote', 'sallet', and on the other hand removing the familiar word when the technical word is really required, as in 'locusts', 'cluster' (for 'acridiens', 'corymbe'); and (3) removing unnecessary ambiguities like 'and by the roads of all the earth the Stranger to his ways'. Does Mr John Hayward, like Homer, nod? I thought it better to mention such minor but specific flaws, because the poem as a whole contains some fine passages, splendidly rendered. Eliot rises to the bigness of the theme in the last section, where the packed rolling *versets* give a remarkable impression of the vivid fullness of life, of human occupations in all their pictorial and concrete diversity, the swarm of a semi-barbaric Asiatic settlement which the wanderer of the poem sets against his even deeper desire for solitude and farther exploration.

> . . . many things on the earth to hear and to see, living things among us! . . .
>
> . . . the invoicing at arrival of caravans, and disbanding of escorts in the quarter of money-changers; budding popularities under the sheds, in front of the frying vats; protestation of bills of credit; destruction of albino animals, of white worms in the soil; fires of bramble and thorn in places defiled by death, the making of a fine bread of barley and sesame; or else of spelt; and the firesmoke of man everywhere . . .

By a Lonely Sea is a collection of short lyrics, mainly translations from French, Italian, Spanish, and German poets. The versions are sympathetic, unpretentious, and faithful, but those from the earlier authors (e.g. Louise Labé) tend to be marred by their archaism of diction. There are some attractive translations of Umberto Saba and Emilio Greco, and good shots here and there at Alberti, Goethe, and Rilke.

Edwin Morgan

IMPERSONAL AND EMBLEMATIC

Robert Graves: *Collected Poems, 1959.* (Cassell, 25/-.)

AFTER reading through these Collected Poems (not the first Graves 'Collected', nor perhaps the last), I am confirmed in my sense of where his surest achievement lies, though my sense of it is enriched by examples I hadn't noticed. His natural and characteristic form is the epigram. I think of such poems as 'Love Without Hope', 'Flying Crooked', 'On Portents', 'Woman and Tree' and (a new one to me) 'New Legends'; it seems that this sort of achievement has been possible for Graves at every stage of his career. And it would be easy to elaborate this into a view of Graves as the Landor of his age. Not only the addiction to

epigram (in the fullest Greek-Anthology sense, with a special place for the sumptuous love-compliment in this form), but also the self-imposed long exile by the Mediterranean, and the face turned to the public at large (irascible, scornful, self-consciously independent) are things that Graves and Landor have in common. What's more, the difficulty we have in making Landor fit (into his age that is, with Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats) is just the difficulty we have seeing where Graves fits in with Eliot and Pound and Yeats, Auden and Thomas. As historians forget about Landor, so, I suspect, they will try to forget Graves. Each poet seems to be the exception that proves the rule about his time, the case which belies the generalisation but cannot disprove it because the case is so clearly a special one. Yet this last limitation (for that's what it is) is not at all so clear in Graves's case as in Landor's; and that's why the comparison shouldn't be pressed — not because it is academic', but because it prejudges the issue.

To begin with, the epigrams are only a small part of Landor's work as a whole, from which moreover they stand apart in a category of their own. And this isn't true of Graves: it is recognisably the virtues of the epigram which inform much work by Graves that is ampler and more relaxed than the epigram proper. And this means that to do him justice we have either to extend the term 'epigram' to a point where it's meaningless, or else find a term more comprehensive. I believe the right term is 'emblem'. This can be applied to a poem like 'Vain and Careless', which develops in very leisurely fashion indeed (such as the strict epigram can never afford) through six quatrains which nevertheless stand to the moral discovery in the final quatrain — 'Water will not mix with oil,/Nor vain with careless heart' — in precisely the same relation as the body of an epigram to its pay-off line. The story of the lady so careless she mislaid her child and the man so vain he walked on stilts is an emblematic fable, as 'The Glutton' is an emblematic image:

> Beyond the Atlas roams a glutton
> Lusty and sleek, a shameless robber,
> Sacred to Aethiopian Aphrodite;
> The aborigines harry it with darts,
> And its flesh is esteemed, though of a fishy tang
> Tainting the eater's mouth and lips.
>
> Ourselves once, wandering in mid-wilderness
> And by despair drawn to this diet,
> Before the meal was over sat apart
> Loathing each other's carrion company.

This is the emblem in the form of riddle. (The answer to the riddle seems to be 'Lust'.) Graves has been much interested in poetic riddles, and in those bodies of literature (e.g. Celtic poetry, and English and Irish folk-lore) which are especially rich in them. Not many of his own riddles are so easy to solve as 'The Glutton'; one of the finest and most extended is also one of the hardest, 'Warning to Children', which I now take to

be just about the most ambitious poem Graves has ever written.

It is common, and reasonable, to define 'emblem' by distinguishing it from 'symbol'. And part of the difficulty we have with Graves has to do with his being an emblematic poet in an age when symbol has been most practised and most highly esteemed. It seems important to insist that the one is not an inferior version of the other; every image in George Herbert, for instance, is an emblem. One can define the difference by saying that the symbol casts a shadow, where the emblem doesn't; the symbol aims to be suggestive, the emblem to be, even in its guise as riddle, ultimately explicit. Another difference might be that the emblem is made, fabricated, where the symbol is *found*; or rather, since it seems plain that both 'making' and 'finding' are involved in any act of imagination, let us say that the symbol aims to give the effect of having been discovered, where the emblem aims at the effect of having been constructed. This is an important distinction, for it means that part of the impressiveness of the good symbol lies in the place and the circumstances of its finding, whereas with the emblem this isn't true. We think the better of Eliot and Baudelaire for finding their symbols in the unexpected because largely unexplored life of the industrial metropolis; but this is no warrant for thinking worse of Graves because he finds his emblems most often in a rural and agrarian England which has vanished. (It's not here that the label 'Georgian' can be made to stick, but rather on an occasional ponderous whimsy, like '"The General Elliott"'.) Who can doubt that the rustic image of 'Love Without Hope' was specifically constructed (perhaps out of memory, but perhaps not) to stand as full and explicit counterpart to the abstractions of its title —

> Love without hope, as when the young bird-catcher
> Swept off his tall hat to the Squire's own daughter,
> So let the imprisoned larks escape and fly
> Singing about her head, as she rode by.

The fullness and explicitness, the dry sharp unshadowed silhouette, the lack of resonance and overtone — these are the virtues of this emblematic writing; and the air of fabrication, even of contrivance (but not laboured contrivance), the evidence of forethought, plan and design — these will displease only the reader who comes to this verse for what it never offered to supply.

Sometimes, it's true, Graves seems not to understand the nature of his own gift. We have implied that the emblem is fitted to deal with those experiences which can be made explicit, whereas the symbol exists to deal with just those experiences which cannot be grasped, which can only be hinted at, seen askance out of the corner of the eye, part of the penumbra which in our mental life hangs densely about the cleared area of experiences which we can formulate. When Graves tries, as he does quite often, to render experiences of nightmare obsession and anxiety, of self-disgust or the fear of madness, his dry and definite technique fails him; and we get the disconcerting effect of a nicely adjusted and chiselled frame about a vaporous centre. The much admired 'Nature's

Lineaments' seems a case of this, and 'Welsh Incident' virtually admits as much. Another example, and an instructive one, is 'The Pier-Glass', a piece which could certainly be spared, bearing as it does every evidence of being very early work. This is almost entirely parasitical on early Tennyson ('Mariana in the Moated Grange' and 'The Lady of Shalott'), and it is interesting chiefly for being so much less 'modern' and 'symbolist', so much more explicit (on a theme which defies explicitness) than Tennyson was in the last century.

One great advantage of emblematic writing is its impersonality. A poet who deals with symbols, a Mallarmé or an Eliot, has to struggle much harder to cut the umbilical cord between poet and poem, so that the poem will stand free and independent. Of course there are those, like Yeats and his admirers, to whom impersonality seems not worth striving for. They find nothing attractive or valuable in the illusion which other poets seek to create, by which the poem shall seem to be a product of the language, and the poet merely the medium through which the language becomes articulate. For them poetry-making is inevitably a histrionic faculty, and they are quite happy to see poetry as the vehicle of personality. It's worth making this point because of a curious passage in Graves's Foreword where, after pointing out that he has lived and written in many countries, he remarks, 'But somehow these poems have never adopted a foreign accent or colouring; they remain true to the Anglo-Irish poetic tradition into which I was born.' What is this Anglo-Irish tradition? It's true that we may think of Father Prout and 'The Graves of Blarney', the Irish tradition of comic and macaronic verse, when Graves turns the delicious joke of a poem written in the pidgin idiom of a Mallorcan pamphlet for English-speaking tourists. But there isn't enough of this sort of thing for Graves to have had it principally in mind. In view of what we know to be his opinion of Yeats, he can hardly mean that either. And yet, to the English reader (rightly or wrongly) the Anglo-Irish poetic tradition means Yeats first and the rest nowhere. Is there any point in comparing Graves with Yeats?

The comparison could be sustained about as far as the comparison with Landor ('The White Goddess', for instance, is a parallel case to Yeats's source-book, 'A Vision'), but in the end it is no more fruitful. Yet the word 'histrionic', as it comes to mind in relation to Yeats particularly and the Anglo-Irish in general, is worth pondering. Graves has shown himself thoroughly at home in the world of the TV screen and the news-reel cameraman; he is not at all reluctant or maladroit in projecting a public image of himself. And this goes along with a self-regarding element in his own poetry, as in poems about his own name or about his own face in a mirror. This is very Yeatsian. Yet in general it's true that Graves uses other media than poetry in which to project his public image. The poems are impersonal in effect, even when they are on very personal themes. And it is the emblematic style which brings this about, whether the poet intended it or not. The histrionic attitude shows through in some of the early poems, notably the much-anthologized

'Rocky Acres', which I was sorry to see had been chosen by George Hartley for his long-playing disc of Graves reading:

> Yet this is my country, beloved by me best,
> The first land that rose from Chaos and the Flood,
> Nursing no valleys for comfort or rest,
> Trampled by no shod hooves, bought with no blood.
> Sempiternal country whose barrows have stood
> Stronghold for demigods when on earth they go,
> Terror for fat burghers on far plains below.

What can the last lines mean except that the poet is himself one of the demigods, poised at the verge of his harsh and craggy kingdom, prepared to harry and pillage bourgeois society? And is this not indeed very like the tall talk and boastful rant of Yeats in many poems, and of the professional Irishman everywhere? And if Yeats is frequently superior to this, isn't it in so piling on the extravagance as to show that he's not taken in by his own performance, but can ironically recognise blarney even when he speaks it himself? It will be interesting to hear how Graves reads this poem, for his very idiosyncratic reading manner, flat and casual, seems designed specifically to avoid rant of any kind.

The precautions he takes against rant aren't characteristically ironical; one sees them almost at once when, a few pages after 'Rocky Acres', that poem is as it were rewritten in a much terser mode, as 'Angry Samson':

> Are they blind, the lords of Gaza
> In their strong towers,
> Who declare Samson pillow-smothered
> And stripped of his powers?
>
> O stolid Philistines,
> Stare now in amaze
> At my foxes running in your cornfields
> With their tails ablaze,
>
> At swung jaw-bone, at bees swarming
> In the stark lion's hide,
> At these, the gates of well-walled Gaza
> A-clank to my stride.

This isn't an important poem, but it has all the impersonality of the emblem, of a medallion; and it seems that not the poet but the English language wrote it, out of the range of meanings that, for instance, 'Philistine' has taken on between the Authorised Version and Matthew Arnold. A good way to see the de-personalizing virtue of the emblem is to compare 'The Reader over my Shoulder' (direct and personal, with accordingly a disastrous thumping of the chest in the last lines) with 'The Legs', which stands beside it and treats the same subject — the poet's attitude to his readers, his public, i.e. his society at large — with completely assured and telling control, only possible after he had

objectified it fully, in a contrived fable. Hereabouts in the collection — in Sections II and III — the fine poems come thick and fast: 'Full Moon', 'Pure Death', and incomparable 'Sick Love', 'Saint', 'Gardener', 'In Broken Images', 'Flying Crooked' — nearly all of these are emblems. 'Flying Crooked' is one such, in which the poet distinguishes himself from other sorts of thinkers, such as logicians; 'In Broken Images', constructed in propositions in couplets, has the same theme, and thus mimics very effectively that very discourse, the logician's, from which it distinguishes itself — and this neatness attained by other means has just the distancing de-personalising effect of the emblems.

In Section IV there are abundant signs of an enormous bitterness, seldom defined and as seldom mastered: such emblems as 'Hell' or 'Nature's Lineaments' or 'Ogres and Pygmies' are off-centre, registering an experience they cannot comprehend. This shows up in minutiae like the word 'raffish' in the penultimate line of 'Nature's Lineaments', which would certainly have been another word if the poet hadn't wanted a rhyme for 'fish'. The effect of thin shallowness in these pieces seems the product not of writing that is superficial, insufficiently engaged, but of writing that is engaged in the wrong way, produced out of the jangle of raw nerves not from the perturbation of imagination. In 'With her Lips Only', the shallowness shows up in another way, as knowledgeable glibness. In different ways two poems do establish imaginative control over the screaming nerves: these are 'Down, Wanton, Down!' and the admirable 'Certain Mercies', and George Hartley takes them both for the disc. He's to be complimented also on choosing 'To Evoke Posterity', a less familiar poem which provides a text to hang in the study of every poet and still more of every poetry-reader:

> To evoke posterity
> Is to weep on your own grave,
> Ventriloquizing for the unborn.

Another body of work that hangs together usefully is Section VII, where Graves seems to have herded together most of his poems that can be described as marginalia, witty but trivial pieces like 'The Persian Version', 'Apollo of the Physiologists', and '1805'. These are the graceful trivia with which he now appears every few weeks or so, in the weekly magazines; one wishes one could be sure that editors and readers are as aware as their author is, of how marginal such pieces are to his and poetry's central and exacting concerns.

Maddeningly, this volume lacks any alphabetical index, whether of titles or first lines.

Donald Davie

BUILDERS WITH BORROWED BRICKS

Selection, A. S. J. Tessimond. (Putnam, 7/6.)
A Matter of Life and Death, Anne Ridler. (Faber, 12/6.)
Goodbye, Earth, I. A. Richards. (Routledge, 12/6.)
The Next Word, Thomas Blackburn. (Putnam, 7/6.)
Catchment Area, James Harrison. (O.U.P., 10/6.)
Loaves and Fishes, George Mackay Brown. (Hogarth Press, 10/6.)

Mr Tessimond writes very well within his chosen limits. He shows us the romantic

> in love with the land that is always over
> The next hill and the next . . . ,

a Jamaican bus with

> The live fowl squatting on the grapefruit and bananas
> in the basket of the copper-coloured lady . . . ,

the British,

> a people living in shells and moving
> Crablike; reticent, awkward, deeply suspicious . . .

all with an ease that quietens our suspicion that his attitude towards them is over-simple. His properties are exact and carefully-selected — possibly too much so. This is adept light verse, and perhaps it is churlish to ask for anything more. After all, what evidence is there that Mr Tessimond has any more to give? Yet even in the most witty of his poems, *A Man of Culture,* Mr Tessimond can suggest those depths he refuses to explore.

> Builder with borrowed bricks on shifting sand,
> Reaper of fields dug deep by earlier spades,
> Echo of echoes, shadower of shades.

While in this rigorous *Selection* there are comparative failures which may indicate unpursued directions more interesting than the stasis of his limited successes. The rhythms of conversation pieces such as *The Advisers* flexibly accommodate dialogue.

> ' What she needs,' Reason says, ' you cannot give her,
> Nor she what you need.' ' No, not now,' says Fate;
> ' But both of you will change. When you are ready
> To play your parts, you will. Be patient. Wait.'

The resigned expectancy of pain in this and other love poems (*Middle-aged Conversation, Conversation with Myself, Not Love Perhaps*) seems to me, in spite of occasional awkwardness, to indicate that, if he had chosen, Mr Tessimond could have been a much more searching poet.

Exploration is not wanting in Mrs Ridler's volume. Unequivocal successes may be rarer than in Mr Tessimond's, but much more complex experience is being manipulated into these cool, remote poems. Possibly too much effort is involved. The reader may find himself acknowledging the poet's ideas without entering into her experience. Mrs Ridler's title

poem chronicles the relationship of a mother to her child from conception to boyhood — a characteristic theme. Perhaps a fear of ugly explicitness causes her to keep experience at a distance.

His smiles are all largesse,
Need ask for no return,
Since give and take are meaningless
To one who gives by needing
And takes our love for granted
And grants a favour even by his greed.

The last line shows that this stems from suckling a child, an activity which gives the mother pleasure as well. The poem would have been more effective if this comment on experience was implied in a re-creation of the experience. The canons of taste which withhold so much essential to the poem prevent the reader from participating in it.

At times, however, this prose-like aloofness keeps near-sentimentality under control. I can't, for example, take Mrs Ridler's assumption of childish innocence in *Before the Fall*, but I must admit that her crisp phrasing prevents what seems to me an essentially sentimental attitude from becoming distasteful in its expression.

To cross the social will
Is a good joke, since nothing wholly divides
You from the milk you spilt,
And so, having no sense of separation
You have no sense of guilt.

Such control, however, should not have been necessary in the first place; and it indicates a degree of willed shaping, rather as though life were material for Mrs Ridler's creation. The reader may be charmed by *Anniversary,* even impressed with its insight, but will he believe what it says?

These fifteen years I have spread my hands to the light of your love.
Its rays should long ago have made me strong:
Did my remorse for wrong
Or fear filter its power from the light,
Or did my darkness divert it from my heart,
That I am still so callow and unsure,
And cannot think to endure
Even the shortest winter out of your sight?

Callow? Unsure? Not the writer of this poised and assured poem.

Mrs Ridler's real strength is shown when she is too involved with her experience to keep it at a distance, when she allows herself to see rather than to comment on, to recall rather than to moralise. Her radio dialogue, *Evenlode*, has passages (only tenuously connected with its decorative mythical plot) which think back into what seems a personal past. *Leaving Ringshall* has, intermittently, something of Frost's harnessing of the prosaic to the service of poetry.

How I look for you
Ghosts of my house . . . My father comes to meet me

Hearing the sound of my arriving wheels
And leaving logs balanced across the sawing-horse,
A gentle greeting figure, his bird-stained hat
Crowning his splendid forehead — here I have him:
Broken nose, sceptical mouth, and hands
Bramble-scarred of a scholar turned to grass . . .

Something, too, of Edward Thomas's intensity of recollection.

. . . Family life, that filled it at a spring tide,
Ebbing has left a wrack of letters, fiddles,
Diaries, dumb-bells and domestic playbills,
Croquet-hoops and solitaire and stilts —
A peaceful littered shore from which we gaze
When the tide of wheat still rushes over the meadow,
The solid sea of clay beneath us breaks
In russets and raspberries, cherry, thyme and cistus,
And the sweet briar, whose scent has flown me here.

Such passages suggest that this minor poet of real though flawed distinction would have made a perceptive novelist.

They are not frequent. Mrs Ridler tends too much to manipulate her experience into words; but the words of Dr Richards seem rather to manipulate his experience — and into the most curious patterns.

Without — within! We were that idle void
Its dust
Its ashes
Its endurances
Its fled shrunk coils of stars
Its wistlessness
Till we our Selves destroyed.
The net
We knit
To sweep
The deep
Outwit the yet-perchances
Took with it what else bars
Existlessness.

To the less engaging idiosyncrasies of Hardy (and, elsewhere, of Empson) Dr Richards adds a tricksiness and concision all his own. The poems read most effectively when least like crabbed notes.

About the boundless yard may trudge
But victim, culprit, hangman, judge.

They then savour of the Georgians whom forty years ago Dr Richards taught us not to like. Unlike many of the Georgians, Dr Richards has ideas which some may think worth disinterring from poems like *The Ruins* and *Retort*; but his best ones are to be found in his introduction to the book, and this itself is a pale shadow of *Principles of Literary Criticism* — to re-read which is to make us feel that there isn't very much time for Dr Richards's poems.

The struggle between Dr Richards and the English language has proved critically rewarding, even though his poems look like the resultant débris. Messrs Blackburn, Harrison and Mackay Brown, on the other hand, give in gracefully. This is not to suggest that they are all equally bad so much as that they are bad in much the same way; constructing poems because of an interest in literature rather than life.

Mr Blackburn uses his not inconsiderable skill in avoiding personal involvement with his themes, and is therefore at his (not very considerable) best when dealing with fairy-tale properties.

> Here where the marshlight of our gold,
> Enamoured face has quite withdrawn,
> We bite on vacancy and taste
> The stale of love; oh, Holly Tree,
> Quicken my heart with your dark thorn.

If these images were at all realised, if the words reacted on each other sufficiently to produce a recognisable total effect, 'taste the stale of love' would be seen to be merely nasty, the syntax of the first two lines would be seen to be obscure, and the idea of a thorn quickening a heart would be seen to be meaningless. But the words are counters; the poet may have supposed the fairy-tale atmosphere would not have allowed us to attend closely to what he was saying. How mechanical, externally constructed and cliché-ridden this 'fairy-tale atmosphere' is may be seen if we compare it with that evoked by Walter de la Mare — on whom this poem leans heavily and who used 'magic' in a far more suggestive way.

> 'Who knocks?' 'I, who was beautiful
> Beyond all dreams to restore,
> I, from the roots of the dark thorn am hither
> And knock on the door.'

In contrast, the 'dark thorn' refrain in Mr Blackburn's poem is no more than decorative; the verse, though accomplished, empty of emotive content.

But though Mr Blackburn's 'bardic' themes are null, he has found a style; Mr Harrison is still in search of his. He tries the 'neo-classical' epigram.

> What one hand earns the other learns to spend
> Else where's the worth of wages? Long or short,
> The odds are mostly even in the end.

Then he tries the vaguely 'neo-romantic'.

> Soon all shall slur to beauty, slur to a white
> Riot of shaken bloom . . .

However, he nowhere succeeds in seeing things in his own way.

George Mackay Brown, on the other hand, has a recognisable style — as rigid a barrier of manner as any latter-day retailer of epic.

> Tired of his thieving guests,
> The kestrel shape that wore his hand and eye,
> The stealthy-by-moon deep-litter ghost,
> And the seducer of vagrant Pertelotes,
> Clad in his innocent hungers Thorfinn walked

Past farmyards havering with hens and greed.

The 'colloquialism' is that last zeugma is as studied as anything in the whole elaborate verbal construction. An Orkney poet, one would have thought, would have innumerable opportunities for first-hand description; but Mr Mackay Brown's 'unfurled gull', 'grimling wolf', 'purple samurai of the flood', 'lucent strings' are reactions (and not very intelligent ones) only to other people's books.

Philip Hobsbaum

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE O.U.P.

Guy Fawkes Night, and Other Poems, John Press. (Oxford University Press, 12/6.)
The Prodigal Son: Poems 1956-1959, James Kirkup. (O.U.P., 15/-.)
A Book of South African Verse, selected and edited by Guy Butler. (O.U.P., 18/-.)
New Zealand Literature: A Survey, E. H. McCormick. (O.U.P., 22/6.)
The Cruising Auk, George Johnston. (O.U.P., 20/-.)

HEIGH-HO, I come tripping from five new books from the Oxford University Press, and how pleasant they all are! A mixed enough bag, ranging through the comfortable and civilized world of Mr Press, threatened by the occasional passion and the possibility of an atomic disaster, but cosy enough for all that; through the bardic, muse-haunted but peaceful world of Mr Kirkup; to an all-white South Africa, where verse is the preserve of the superior race, to the literature of New Zealand 'in the period of British occupation' and to Mr Johnston's Canada, peopled by quaint aunts and young lovers. It may be chance that what the books have in common is a world of cosiness and few cares, or it may be that the O.U.P. pays a conscious deference to the tradition of the gentleman amateur, grants its scholarly patronage to poets a little out of the main stream, and respects the Mandarin world that all of them call to mind. At any rate, I understood Mr Raymond Mortimer perfectly when, in *The Sunday Times,* he remarked: 'Delightfully cultivated, and intelligible as well as intellectual, Mr Kirkup and Mr Press can be recommended even to those who as a rule enjoy the poets only of the past.' There are, then, some decent people about who still read poetry, provided that it isn't too intellectual and isn't too much about now, and certainly it is to such an audience that the five volumes under review would appeal.

Yet I suppose that those of us who think that poetry has a responsibility to criticize its own time, to control its materials by some moral honesty and to add (as R. P. Blackmur nicely put it) to the stock of available reality ought, still, to be deferential; for Mr Mortimer defines an audience and, goodness knows, in these days audiences for poetry are not easy to come by. If such audiences can be reached without tem-

porizing (an achievement which, I think, Philip Larkin has succeeded in) then we have a right to be grateful (even though Mr Larkin is certainly not the latter-day Georgian many who speak for this audience think him to be). But a straight approach to such an audience can be *too* modest, in these days when modesty is a poetic virtue; it can lead to the kind of poetry which is charged with nothing save the graceful, the delightful, the ultra-poetic, the over-playful. These are the faults I find in the three personal collections under review.

The modesty of Mr Press, who is so retiring that you cannot find him, is not what is needed; nor, I think, is the highly poetic embracing-all-things way of Mr Kirkup. Mr Press doesn't pretend to be more than he is, while Mr Kirkup, it seems to me, does. But the diffident but casual air of Mr Press is not a voice; he can be as rich as Kirkup when he pleases. Since in these days there are small pickings for poetry, one may have to make a virtue out of the minor key. But Larkin is plainly of his time, while Mr Press is of anybody's. He is closer to the other modesty, that of the gentleman amateur, touching up another nice little poem and making each one a job of work on its own, charming, light, but with little in common with any other poem by him. He can be liberal or reactionary, can do a good job on either side of the fence. He is safe rather than sorry. His serious poems use wide-open images of fruitful or fruitless living — winter and spring, ice and sun — and you can be sure he is on the right side ('you came/To break the ice that clamped my northern heart'). But his poems are very much cold northern heart. He will use such well-worn imagery, fall into infelicities ('You sit there like a dark and heavy flower') and into unrealised poetic abstractions; then one comes up against something with a bit of authentic feeling in it ('The Awakening', for instance) and wonders just what is going on. Then before you know, he is off on his Caprices, parodying Betjeman rather mildly, guffawing at Kipling and then tossing in what seems like straight reactionary propaganda ('Holy Whilhelmina's Prayer').

If Mr Press is a hiding poet, Mr Kirkup keeps popping into the bedroom and coming back in something more comfortable; he is at your lapels all the time. Modesty isn't his vein. I have to say frankly that I'm never quite sure about Mr Kirkup, because there are moments when he is on to something. But he does put you off. Many poets write poems about writing poems, but it takes Kirkup to write poems about *wanting* to write poems, or not being able to write poems, or wondering whether to write a poem or not. His first piece begins:

> I wait with a pencil in my hand
> Beside the morning's empty page

And you can imagine it; he keeps his pencil permanently in his ear, like a journalist, and is always on the look-out for a subject, popping down caves, into sailplanes, away to Sweden, Spain and Japan. But:

> The dumb words are fastened in my throat,
> And will not come.

So he writes about that instead. Poetry, he tells us in the first four poems

in the volume, is a cry against the stillness; it is a lonely and ceaseless search for the words you cannot find; it is the beloved object lost and sought time and again in redefinition. He cries:

Let the dark be such a night
As to call the eye to light.
— And let such dense a quiet be
That my tongue returns to me.

One does not need to explain that Kirkup is a romantic, or that losing his tongue is really the least likely of his troubles; his difficulty lies in the other direction. He is a Poet; the label is always showing. He is given to vague, unrealized longings for undefined loved ones and lost poems, to sentiments which exceed the demands of the matter in hand. He builds by diffusion; Chinese and Japanese verse forms tempt him, and he has some of the oriental controls, a gift for the right image. One cannot but respect his search to pin down the undefinable, but one distrusts so *many* reports on his failure. He is certainly an Imagist, in the Amy Lowell rather than the Pound manner.

Some of his pieces in oriental modes strike me as being exercises well worth doing; look, for instance, at 'Notes On a Poem to Be Dropped Out of an Upper Window':

Into the falling snow
Another falling flake
Falls to the street below.

There I hear it break
Into laughter, tears, or a slow
Curse: each one is a mistake.

Better not to know
The sense its readers make.
Care only for the falling flake.

I hope that he will consolidate the authentic note I hear in the above.

I have left myself little space to deal with the other three volumes from the commonwealth; I have done so deliberately, for at the risk of sounding like Sydney Smith condemning American literature as an impossible aspiration, I can't feel very strongly that there are strong and distinctive literary traditions in South Africa, New Zealand or even Canada; they are rather side-streams of other literatures, English or American. South Africa has produced negro poets of interest, as a recent collection, *From Darkness into Light*, showed; but these are not represented in Guy Butler's selection. Indeed it is difficult to see the rationale behind the selection at all; for many of the poets represented were not born in South Africa, some were temporary visitors, and of one, A. M. Buckton, it is noted simply: 'She never visited South Africa.' Most of the best poets represented withdrew to England and belong very clearly in the English poetic scene (Roy Campbell, R. N. Currey, L. D. Lerner, John Peter, William Plomer, F. T. Prince and David Wright). One

cannot help but wonder whether they came because they were the best or seem the best because they came, and on the evidence of the few poems here one isn't able to decide. Mr Butler points up the difficulties of South African literary production in his preface; there is no South African literary periodical; most writers leave the Union; London is still the literary focus. I am not in a position to evaluate Guy Butler's choices, but I will say that what I am left with is rather a pleasantly overall evocation of a country rather than an impression of distinguished poets working in a common tradition. Anthony Delius's rough satire is something of a find, and several kinds of freshness come out of the anthology as a whole. About E. H. McCormick's *New Zealand Literature* I can say little more than that it exists, and is substantial; research has been done, and the author follows out the careers of, I suppose, practically every New Zealand writer. '*London* — it is life,' wrote Katherine Mansfield, and most of her fellow New Zealand writers seem to have agreed with her.

From Canada comes *The Cruising Auk*, a strange collection of light pieces somewhat in the vein of the Mr Eliot at his Sunday Morning Service or with his Practical Cats. Quaint aunts and people with strange names — Mr Goom, Mr Murple, Mrs McWhirter — people these pages, and it is a suburban, Betjemanesque world that is called to view. Some of the poems have been it seems written for children; others have a whimsical touch of philosophy about them. I resented being told that 'the sophisticated discipline and subtleties of his verse deserve the attention of the most serious critic' but I don't dispute that Mr Johnston has found himself a pleasant little vein and can be both amusing and charming . . . and sometimes absurd.

Malcolm Bradbury

MYTHOGRAPHIA LITERARIA

Selected Poems of S. T. Coleridge, edited by James Reeves. (Heinemann, 8/6.)
Coleridge the Visionary, J. B. Beer. (Chatto & Windus, 30/-.)

Mr Reeves, an experienced introducer and selector, has added Coleridge to the Poetry Bookshelf; and in 130 pages prints all the necessary verse. I think he errs in rejecting the Dejection Ode in favour of the early version, a verse-letter to Sara Hutchinson; this is almost three times as long and much more explicit about the poet's domestic difficulties, but it does not replace the Ode. Of course, everybody should know it, and the proper course would have been to give both versions. Mr Reeves is also under a false impression about the 'Letter to Asra', namely that it never appeared in print till 1947.

It is no longer a novelty to consider the major Romantic poets in

their relation to various occult traditions. Blake enforces such studies; and more general enquiries, going back to the early 1940s, include Hungerford's *Shores of Darkness*, Ruthven Todd's *Tracks in the Snow*, and, more academic, Stallknecht's *Strange Seas of Thought* and Beach's invaluable *Concept of Nature*, firmly linking Wordsworth and Coleridge with the Cambridge Platonists. Also there is a long-standing critical tradition that finds in most major writers a dependence upon esoteric philosophy; for instance, Saurat's books, and rather more crazily Colin Still's, which powerfully affected Wilson Knight. Again, it should be remembered that the magic view of literature inheres in later Romanticism; the Great Memory is older than Yeats, and the advent of Frazer and Jung licensed critics to seek occult patterns without regard to the author's intention, so that given the conditions of Romantic literature and its strong anti-intellectualist bent, occultism both conscious and unconscious might be confidently sought in peaceful coexistence almost anywhere. However, it is the peculiar achievement of the present decade, and largely of the University of Cambridge, to have systematically explored the consciously 'visionary' element in much great poetry. Wordsworth seems to prove too 'matter-of-fact' and is consequently treated with some impatience; but Shelley and Keats, Blake and Yeats of course, and now Coleridge, have been exhaustively treated.

Suppose that behind the work of each of these poets there is an unwritten *Vision*; and that this *Vision* deserves serious philosophical examination, even if its author declares to the contrary as Yeats did. Then what is required in a reconstruction of the unwritten work, and a demonstration that the writer's poetry is based upon it. At its worst this method produces very bad books, as when the critic transfers his allegiance from the poetry to the system, treating the verses as codes to be broken; at its best — with sure and learned handling of the source material, of its nature scattered and fragmentary, with reasonable disinterest, it can have the value of any other systematic and sensitive examination of poetry in relation to its sources. Mr Beer's book is of this latter kind. He is pretty level-headed, can talk of Tom Taylor without running mad, has grasped the terrifyingly disject material with a thoroughness that places him at once among the three of four most learned Coleridgeans; and although he must have spent years reading minutely what Coleridge read and wrote, he often makes relevant use of remoter literature. He is no propagandist for a perennial philosophy, and has a scholar's idea of relevance, only occasionally betrayed. The result is a book somewhat heavily written but accurate and assured; it will at once take high rank among books on Coleridge, and that in a time of relatively high output.

What Mr Beer has to extract is the 'myth' which was the 'organizing framework' of Coleridge's major poetry, a myth that 'had the advantage of linking truths of . . . various levels . . .; those, namely, of human society, of the universe in general, and of the ultimate spiritual order'. So he explores the poet's schoolboy Platonism, his theological adventures at Cambridge, his early Unitarianism (with some new bio-

graphical inferences) and, most important for the purpose, his mythological studies and his interest in the 'Visionaries', of whom there were a good many at the time. They belonged to a tradition stretching from 'Tauth the Egyptian to Taylor the English Pagan' (Tauth or Thoth is Hermes Trismegistus, supposititious author of the *Hermetica,* which were known before Coleridge's time to be not Egyptian but Hellenistic). Mr Beer shows that Coleridge used work in this tradition, including Berkeley's *Siris* as well as the contemporary mythographers and the more predictable sources like Boehme (to whom he somewhat unnecessarily attributes Coleridge's frequent head-heart dichotomy) and Swedenborg. The poet wrote, in the *Biographia Literaria,* of the part played by such writings in saving him from the 'reflective faculty that partakes of death', but he also sometimes spoke of them in a fondly disparaging way; this Mr Beer explains as an example of Coleridge's ambiguous modesty, just as devotees of Yeats's *Vision* find reasons to ignore Yeats's own remarks on its status. However, it is clear that Coleridge, like Yeats, was fascinated by the theory of an 'esoteric Faith' handed on from the Patriarchs to Moses and from Moses to the last of the Prophets — and then continued, though by refraction . . . in the earliest Cabbala'. Certain images of Coleridge are held to derive their substance from this lore; the sun and serpents, for example, carry a great weight of mytho-metaphysical significance. With much special information of this kind to hand, Mr Beer tackles the major poems. His approach differs from that of Lowes because Lowes assumed that the complex accumulations of remembered reading he found deposited in Coleridge's imagery were random and unsystematic; he also despised the occult learning too much to treat it seriously. Mr Beer, on the other hand, wants to establish that there was no discontinuity between the thinker and the poet; that the thought determines the structure of the poems, for Coleridge 'could not separate the poetry from the truth'.

The implications of all this for the poetry are very complex, and depend so much upon the attribution of occult meanings to details that it would be difficult and perhaps useless to summarise Mr Beer's interpretations. Of *The Ancient Mariner* he makes this kind of point: 'In terms of the Egyptian hierogram, the Mariner, in killing the albatross, destroys the connection between the sun and the serpent. In consequence, the two become separate, and equally alien to man. The serpent, representative of the flesh, becomes loathsome and corrupt, while the sun, now that the true inward vision is lost, is apprehended only as heat or wrath'. The Sun, in fact, is 'a symbol . . . of God and the image of God in human reason'. An example of detailed interpretation: the burning right arms of the dead mariners represent the revelation of the torch-bearer in the Eleusinian mysteries. (This, of course, gives an unfair impression, because it leaves out the supporting arguments.) Beer's conclusion is that the poem's symbolic structure 'finds one of its poles in the concept of the ideal Sun and seraphs [much depends upon a Hebrew pun, *seraph* and *saraph,* a snake], where pure intelligences are in communion with a

Deity who is source of light and harmony; the other pole being the Mariner himself, with a set of subtle and dynamic symbols relating him to, and alienating him from, the ideal state'. *Christabel* elicits a more tentative enquiry because of its unfinished state; the heroine is linked with Teresa of Avila, and is called the 'obverse' of Psyche, in one of Coleridge's favourite myths; and the poem depends upon images as ambivalent as the sun in *The Ancient Mariner*, notably that of the serpent and its vast esoteric lore. *Kubla Khan*, as a very elaborate myth of the lost paradise and the failure of intellectualism to regain it, requires eighty pages for full exposition. It is of all the poems the most loaded with occult significance: the cave is a symbol of the ἓν καί πᾶν and therefore of Isis', the Abyssinian maid is a troglodyte guardian of the ancient truth; the eater of honeydew in the last stanza is Coleridge's 'divine man', the beneficent genius of imagination, true restorer of lost paradise. This is the fullest, most compressed, union of the shaping and the enquiring spirits in Coleridge.

Finally Mr Beer addresses himself to the rather urgent questions these interpretations raise. He believes that Coleridge's becoming acquainted with German critical philosophy at the turn of the century must have been the cause of his losing confidence in his 'visionary world', and he dates the decline of Coleridge's poetry, as well as the growing misery of his private life, from that moment. Part of the interest of this argument is that it makes explicit Mr Beer's own evident non-attachment to the doctrines of the visionary, and this is an important qualification for sensible work in the field. Another is that he will not claim that this is the right and only way to read Coleridge, only that such knowledge can contribute to their force for some. It seems clear that he is very often substantially correct in his interpretation of what Coleridge was doing, and even produces, in some lines of Patmore, a scrap of evidence that the Victorian poet knew how to read *Kubla Khan* in this way. Altogether Mr Beer provides a very convincing demonstration of the power of a peculiarly Romantic form of anti-intellectualism, essential perhaps to the very writing of Romantic poetry; and he raises, for critics who cannot think it their task to exhume this interesting rubbish, the problem to which the only Romantic answer is the Great Memory: how does a poem written in this way come to have *communicable* force? That argument eventually leads us, these days, to the misinterpretation of Blake in Women's Institutes, and Mr Beer, who has done quite enough for one book, is wise to steer clear of it.

Frank Kermode

MISREADING BETWEEN THE LINES

The Shakespearean Ethic, John Vyvyan. (Chatto & Windus (1959), 18/-.)

THE quality and method of this book may be shown most easily by providing a summary of the very original interpretation it provides (across a number of chapters) of that most interpreted of plays — *Hamlet.* For Mr Vyvyan *Hamlet* is really an allegory of the soul of man, in which man (Hamlet) is allowed to choose between the higher path of 'love' and the lower path of 'revenge'. He chooses revenge and this leads to the 'tragic' and deplored fact of death. Not only so, but the true action for Mr Vyvyan goes on in the mind of Hamlet himself; there, in 'an under-drama expressing [Shakespeare's] deepest thoughts to a circle of the select', characters are no longer what they seemed to be in the play: Ophelia becomes *Love*, Polonius *Fidelity*, Laertes *Revenge* ('Hamlet's vengeance incarnate') and Fortinbras (guess what!) *Genocide.* We may agree that Ophelia is Hamlet's love (to pick out the sanest identification from the list), as that Desdemona is Othello's love, and Miranda the love of both Prospero and Ferdinand; but three truths do not add up (except in the mystical arithmetic that Mr Vyvyan practises) to Ophelia (or Desdemona, or Miranda) being Love incarnate, nor do they make a viable art-form out of a system of such abstractions, however liberally we may pepper the argument with talk of allegory and the heritage of the liturgical drama. The plays at the level of the 'surface drama which would appeal to everyone' may be too complex for Mr Vyvyan's purpose; but it does not mean that we must follow him in preferring trite abstractions to the observation of life.

The persuasiveness of 'mystical' interpretations depends on two things: the trustworthiness established by the author in his handling of particular passages, and the capacity of the final interpretation to enlarge or underwrite the basic common-sense point of view. On neither of these counts can this book be thought worthwhile. Mr Vyvyan far too often misunderstands the literal level of Shakespeare's language to give us any confidence in his flights to the mystical levels. What are we to make of an interpretation of *Hamlet* that never mentions the first soliloquy, when the first soliloquy bears heavily against the interpretation proposed? What are we to make of an interpretation of *Measure for Measure* that depends on a view that Isabella is only prevented from blinding Angelo (in the same literal way that Cornwall blinds Gloster) by the intervention of the Duke? — all this on the basis of a quotation that is doctored into support by the silent removal of the intervening lines. Isabella has to be a revenger-converted-from-revenge if she is to take her place in the system as the antithesis of Hamlet. Throughout the book the plays are distorted to provide what the title describes — Mr Vyvyan's ethical system, to which Shakespeare contributes only in the manner of a witness at a

Communist trial, by providing evidence that has been brainwashed into conformity.

Any difficulty that the text might impose is solved, not to say washed away, by this method of substituting the abstraction for the person. When Polonius is stabbed behind the arras we are really seeing 'Fidelity [being] killed behind the dark veils of Hamlet's soul'. The fight in Ophelia's grave might offend at a realistic level, but does not, because it really shows 'a soul that makes itself the grave of love inevitably becomes the womb of hate'. And this is not only the moral of *Hamlet*, but of the whole canon; when pressed into abstraction all the plays say the same thing, and it occurs to one reader at least that the thing was not worth saying anyway.

It may be difficult to see why anyone should write and any reputable firm ever publish stuff like this. I cannot answer the second part of this question; but it is abundantly clear that Mr Vyvyan has written because he has a hunger for Sacred Books and would like to see Shakespeare read for the reason that he possesses 'the essential principle for the establishment of harmony between the Christian and Perennial Philosophy'. In an age without specific religious faith such mystagogy is liable to become attached to literary texts; occasionally, when the search for 'meaning' is accompanied by a respect for the dramatic action, or for the texture and feel of life as it appears in the separate plays, it can produce genuine insights (as in many of Wilson Knight's essays); but when the plays are pulverised and the result is nothing but a series of do-good-to-the-soul pokerwork mottoes from Jung the process cannot be recommended to any reader except the congenital crank.

G. K. Hunter

A SERIOUS BOOK

Poetry and Morality, Vincent Buckley. (Chatto & Windus, 21/-.)

THIS is a serious attempt to tackle a difficult topic. Mr Buckley approaches the question 'In what sense is the greatness of poetry a moral greatness?' by way of a study of the critical writings of Arnold, Eliot and Leavis. I am not convinced that his *modus operandi* is well chosen, since the question involves problems about the nature of aesthetic and moral judgements (philosophical problems in fact) which these writers, for all their distinction as critics, rarely face; he is therefore driven to extract general implications from scattered passages, a tricky procedure when one is dealing with such slippery customers, who seem so often intent on shunning the sort of formulation which Mr Buckley is determined to wring out of them.

The result is a painstaking book which is difficult to read, often clumsily written, but nevertheless worthy of attention from anyone

interested in the status of literary-critical judgements. Readers who do not share Mr Buckley's religious interests may feel with me that too much, and too respectful attention is given to Eliot's dubious concern with 'orthodoxy' in his later writings, but he is very far from swallowing Old Father Possum whole, and there is an admirable astringency in many passages of the two chapters on Eliot. On Arnold, too, he has many good things to say, but here one discerns a basic failure of sympathy, issuing at times in a tone one can only describe as 'snooty':

> If poetry can be seen as utterance, and if its value as utterance can be traced with such confidence back to the inner life of its author, then there is no reason why we should not leave the attempt to learn from the poetry and try to learn from the life of the poet — or at least from what we can speculatively assume of the life of the poet.

As an objection to considering poetry as utterance this seems to me downright silly. This particular ball was set rolling by Eliot: '. . . the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.' The famous 'classical' doctrine of impersonality (note in passing the significant switch from 'who' to 'which') is closely scrutinized by Mr Buckley, who clearly sees that some of its implications are very odd; nevertheless he is kinder to it than it deserves, as he is also to Eliot's conception of tradition. The phrase 'the impersonality of great art' corresponds with something in our experience, however imprecise might be our formulation of that 'something'. On the other hand art is in some sense personal utterance (which is something quite other than 'expressing one's personality'); 'Art speech is the only speech.' We may not be content to rest in paradox, but at least Mr Buckley helps us to see more clearly where the paradox lies.

The notion of 'impersonality' is further examined in the two chapters on Leavis which are in many ways the best part of the book, clearer and more compact than the earlier sections. It would be impossible to summarise here the examination of the moral bases of Leavis's criticism, springing from admiration which never degenerates into stultifying 'respect'. Lesser critics have rarely been happy in writing of Leavis's work as a whole, and Mr Buckley is, in essential seriousness and true discrimination, streets ahead of any of them.

S. W. Dawson